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KP narcotics law undermines federal powers, FCC told

• Court hears dispute between Centre, province over anti-drugs legislation • Plea moved by federal govt argues presence of provincial law may 'add to legal complications'

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) was told on Thursday that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's having its own narcotics law, in addition to the Control of Narcotics Substances Act (CNSA) 1997, would only undermine the federal government's anti-drug efforts and might add to legal complications.

The arguments were advanced by the federal government before a two-judge FCC bench comprising Justices Ali Baqar Najafi and Muhammad Karim Khan Agha.

The bench was hearing a petition jointly moved by the federal government and the Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) seeking to set aside the KP Control of Narcotics Substances Act 2019.

The controversy revolves around whether a province can enact a parallel narcotics law in the presence of Section 71 of the CNSA 1997 — a move that the petitioners argue "undermine the federal government's authority to legislate".

Filed against the backdrop of KP's parallel legislation, despite the CNSA 1997 already being in effect, the petition asked the FCC to interpret the executive powers of both the federal and provincial governments under the Constitution.

The petition argued that the federal government played a vital role in controlling and eliminating the narcotics threat in the country, particularly in the processing and trafficking of heroin and charas.

It stated that the federal government had already taken effective measures to combat all aspects of the multifaceted drug problem since long.

'Not a dispute'

During the hearing, Barrister Syed Ali Zafar, representing the KP government, argued that the matter did not represent a dispute between the federal and provincial governments, as the law was duly enacted by the KP Assembly.

In response, Additional Attorney General (AAG) Chaudhry Aamir Rehman questioned how a provincial law could repeal a federal legislation.

He added that once a province established its own force or agency to implement such a law, a dispute between the federal and provincial governments was bound to erupt.

The FCC adjourned further proceedings until next week.

'Comprehensive law'

The petition expressed the concern that the provincial law repealed the CNSA 1997 within KP to the extent of cultivation, possession, sale, purchase, delivery, and transportation of narcotics.

It termed the KP law a "mala fide" and "colourable" exercise of power, seeking its declaration as illegal.

It stated that licensing authority for import, export, internal transport, manufacturing, and transshipment of narcotic drugs fell within the purview of the federal government under the CNSA 1997.

The provincial law, the petition contended, would create grave legal and constitutional chaos, including duplication of special courts, overlapping jurisdiction, and conflict of authority with other law enforcement agencies. This, the plea added, could lead to a legal and constitutional crisis.

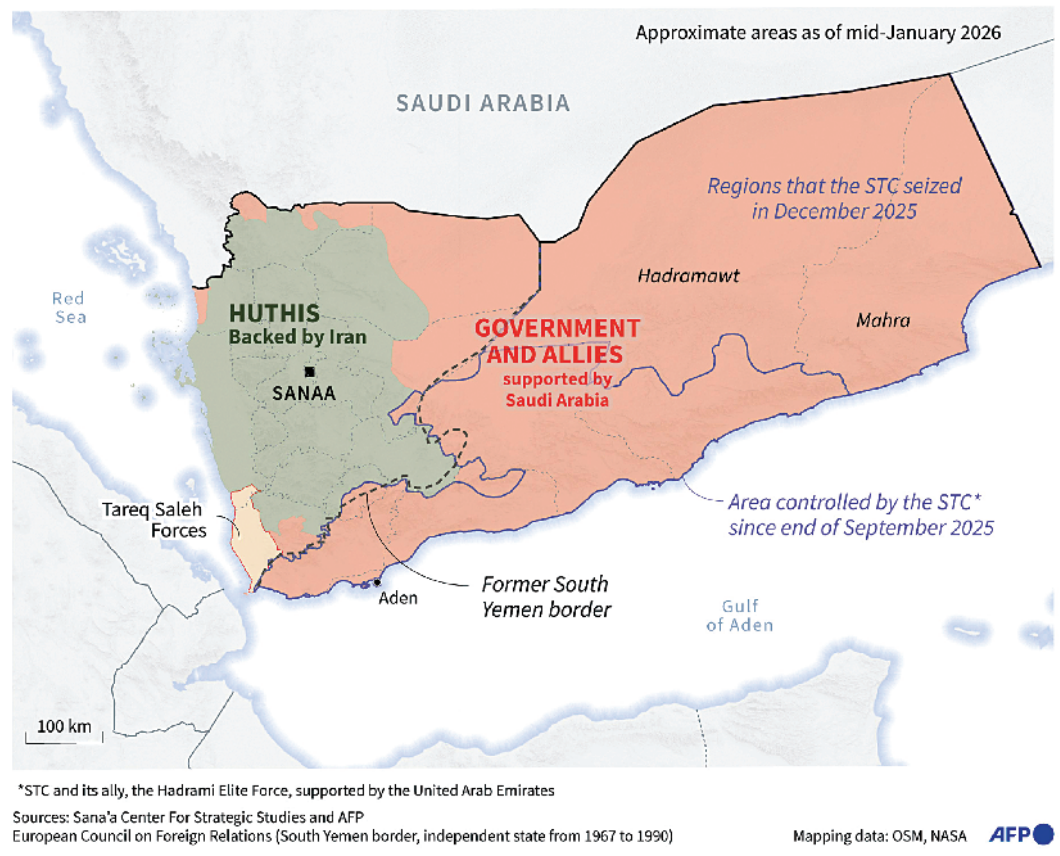
The petition argued that the CNSA 1997 was a comprehensive law applicable across Pakistan to curb the menace of narcotics as airports, dry ports, seaports, and land borders fell under the exclusive control of the federal government, which exercised its jurisdiction through the ANF.

It contended that as narcotics trafficking was not only a cross-border offence but one with regional and international implications, only a federal agency could effectively deal with the menace, as the jurisdiction of provincial force extended only within its frontiers.

The petition further argued that in the presence of a federal law enacted by parliament within its legislative competence under Articles 90 and 142 and Entries 3, 26, 27, 32, and 58 of the Federal Legislative List, any provincial law would be contradictory and thus void.

Yemen: government regains control of the south

The UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC) launched a major offensive in December 2025



*STC and its ally, the Hadrami Elite Force, supported by the United Arab Emirates

Sources: Sana'a Center For Strategic Studies and AFP
European Council on Foreign Relations (South Yemen border, independent state from 1967 to 1990)

Mapping data: OSM, NASA AFP

Saudi Arabia pledges $500m for southern Yemen's uplift

Pakistan urges UN to push for inclusive political deal

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has announced a sweeping $500 million development package for southern Yemen following a government offensive against allied separatists, while Pakistan has urged the UN Security Council to push for an inclusive political settlement to the protracted conflict.

The development initiative, spanning 10 provinces, signals an increasingly assertive posture by the Kingdom after recent volatility in the region. Last year, the separatist Southern Transitional Council swept through parts of the south, advancing near the Saudi border.

Riyadh declared the manoeuvre a threat to its national security and backed a military offensive earlier this month that routed the STC from power.

Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman met on Wednesday with the head of Yemen's internationally recognised government and members of the Presidential Leadership Council to affirm the kingdom's backing.

According to a statement on his account on the social platform X, the new projects include the construction of hospitals, schools and roads, as well as fuel donations to boost power production.

The kingdom also announced the construction of a mosque on the island of Socotra named "The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques," a reference to the Saudi king.

"This support embodies the kingdom's keenness to enhance security and stability, and to contribute to building a better future for Yemen and its brotherly people," the statement read.

Separately, Pakistan called on international powers to address the deepening crisis. Speaking to the UN Security Council, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Asim Ahmad warned that millions are suffering due to the collapse of basic services.

"We encourage all Yemeni stakeholders and regional partners to engage constructively towards an inclusive and durable political settlement that reflects the aspiration of all the Yemeni people and safeguards regional peace and stability," Mr Ahmad said.

The Pakistani envoy welcomed a call by the Aden-based Presidential Leadership Council to convene comprehensive talks in Riyadh.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to Yemen's territorial integrity and opposed unilateral actions that risk deepening divisions.

Furthermore, Ahmad condemned the detention of UN and relief personnel and the seizure of UN premises in areas controlled by the Houthis, terming it a "blatant disregard for international law".

Only two-thirds of Yemen's children are fully immunised, leaving millions vulnerable to deadly diseases such as measles, diphtheria, cholera and polio. Ahmad urged the Security Council to act with unity to support a credible pathway toward peace.

"We hope that these efforts will result in concrete steps towards achieving lasting peace and an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people," Ahmad said.

Meanwhile, UN Special Envoy Hans Grundberg noted that in response to STC's expansion in Hadramout and Al Mahra, Saudi-backed government forces moved in early January to reassert control, emphasising that Yemen's future cannot be determined by force.

Political uncertainty has devastated Yemen's economy, eroding household resilience through rising prices and unpaid salaries. Ramesh Rajasingham, director of the humanitarian sector for the UN aid coordination office, told the Council that needs are rising while access becomes restricted.

Rajasingham warned that over 18 million people will face acute food insecurity next month.—Agencies

xAI curbs Grok image editing after worldwide backlash

WASHINGTON: Elon Musk's artificial intelligence company xAI said late on Wednesday it imposed restrictions on all users of its Grok AI chatbot that limit image editing after the service produced sexualised images that sparked concerns among global regulators.

From Europe to Asia, governments and regulators are cracking down on the sexually explicit content generated by Grok, imposing bans and demanding safeguards in a growing global push to curb illegal material.

"We have implemented technological measures to prevent the Grok account from allowing the editing of images of real people in revealing clothing such as bikinis," the company said in an X post.

"This restriction applies to all users, including paid subscribers."

Hyper-realistic images of women manipulated to look like they were in microscopic bikinis, in degrading poses or covered in bruises began flooding social media platform X this month.

In some cases, minors were digitally stripped down to swimwear, sparking broad criticism.

Last week, Grok began allowing only paying subscribers to use its image generation and editing features.

X curtailed Grok's ability to generate or edit images publicly for many of its users, but the chatbot still privately produced sexually charged images on demand on Wednesday before xAI's announcement, Reuters found.

Billionaire Musk owns xAI, which in turn owns X, formerly known as Twitter.

On Wednesday, xAI added that it blocks users, based on their location, from generating images of people in skimpy attire in "jurisdictions where it's illegal". It did not identify those jurisdictions.

Lawmakers and advocacy groups have called for Apple and Google to drop Grok from app stores. At first, Musk publicly laughed off the controversy, however, X has recently said it treats reports of child sexual abuse material seriously and polices it vigorously. —Reuters

Ranking of Pakistani passport improves by five places on global index

Singapore tops list with access to 192 countries

Dawn Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's passport ranking has improved on the Henley Index, rising from 103 in 2025 to 98 this year, according to figures released on Thursday.

According to the latest rankings, Pakistan's travel document was placed 98th on the list, improving by five places and tying with Yemen. The index ranked Pakistan above Iraq (99), Syria (100) and Afghanistan (101).

The ranking showed that the Pakistani passport allows visa-free access to 31 countries, including visa-on-arrival facilities.

Singapore topped the index with visa-free access to 192 countries, followed by Japan and South Korea with 188. Denmark, Luxembourg, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland jointly ranked third, with visa-free access to 186 countries.

According to the Henley Index, Pakistani passport holders have visa-free access to Barbados, Cook Islands, Dominica, Haiti, Micronesia, Montserrat, Rwanda, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vanuatu.

Visa-on-arrival is available for Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde Islands, Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal, Niue, Palau Islands, Qatar, Samoa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu.

Pakistani passport holders can also avail an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for Kenya, Seychelles and Sri Lanka.

In a post on X, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi welcomed the development, terming it a "strong achievement" and vowing that the "momentum will continue".

In October last year, the Pakistani passport ranked the fourth worst for the fifth consecutive year, with a ranking of 103.

Pakistan's passport has been declared the world's fourth worst since at least 2021 on the Henley Index, which calculates countries' "visa-free score" — the number of destinations travellers can access without a prior visa or with a visa on arrival.

The travel document was ranked 100th in 2024 and 2023, 109th in 2022, when it allowed entry into 32 countries without a prior visa, and 107th in 2021 with the same visa-free score.

Applicants from Pakistan will still be interviewed

Pakistan among states whose nationals will be affected under new US immigration measure

By Anwar Iqbal

WASHINGTON: The US State Department has clarified that immigrant visa applicants from Pakistan will still be allowed to submit applications and attend scheduled interviews, but no immigrant visas will be issued during a newly announced pause that takes effect on January 21.

In a question-and-answer guidance released alongside the policy, the department said that the suspension does not revoke any immigrant visas already issued, nor does it apply to tourist or other non-immigrant visas.

Questions related to admission into the US, it added, fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security.

The guidance also states that dual nationals applying with a valid passport from a country not included on the affected list are exempt from the pause.

Pakistan is among more the 75 countries whose nationals will be affected under the new measure, which the State Department said is part of a comprehensive review ordered by President Donald Trump to ensure that immigrants are "financially self-sufficient and not a financial burden to Americans".

"President Trump has made clear that immigrants must be financially self-sufficient," the department said, adding that all policies, regulations and guidance are being reviewed to prevent immigrants from becoming a public charge.

The sweeping list spans Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and eastern Europe, and includes countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Nigeria, Haiti, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Sudan, Syria, Russia and Brazil.

According to internal guidance cited by officials, exceptions may be granted if an applicant can demonstrate that their travel would serve an "America First" national interest, though the criteria for such exemptions have not been publicly defined.

The guidance also instructs consular officers that if an immigrant visa has already been approved but has not yet been printed, the case must be refused.

The department said US embassies and consulates will continue to schedule immigrant visa appointments for affected nationals during the pause, but issuance will remain suspended while the review is underway.

The announcement formalises an earlier slowdown in immigrant visa processing that had already begun affecting Pakistani applicants.

The State Department did not specify how long the pause would remain in place.

Who is Ali Shaath, Palestinian chosen by Trump to lead Gaza

• Ex-deputy planning minister vows to clear debris in three years; Belfast-educated civil engineer will chair 15-member body • Prioritises urgent temporary shelter over rebuilding; defies UN estimates with seven-year restoration timeline • Secures dual endorsement from Hamas, Mahmoud Abbas

JERUSALEM: Ali Shaath, the Palestinian former government official chosen to administer Gaza under a US-backed deal, has an ambitious plan that includes pushing war debris into the Mediterranean Sea and rebuilding destroyed infrastructure within three years.

The appointment of the civil engineer and former deputy planning minister on Thursday marked the start of the next phase of US President Donald Trump's plan to end Israel's war in Gaza.

Shaath will chair a group of 15 Palestinian technocrats tasked with governing the Palestinian enclave after years of occupation by Israel.

Under Trump's plan, Israel has withdrawn from nearly

ALI Shaath

half of Gaza but its troops remain in control of the other half, a wasteland where nearly all buildings have been destroyed. Trump has floated turning Gaza into the "Riviera of the Middle East".

Shaath will face the uncertain task of rebuilding the territory's shattered infrastructure and clearing an estimated 68 million tonnes of rubble and unexploded ordnance even as Israel and Hamas continue to trade fire.

After past rounds of fighting with Israel, Palestinians in Gaza used war rubble as foundational material for the historic marina in Gaza City and for other projects. In an interview with a Palestinian radio station on Thursday, Shaath suggested a similar approach.

"If I brought bulldozers and pushed the rubble into the sea, and made new islands, new land, I can win new land for Gaza and at the same time clear the rubble," he said, suggesting the debris could be removed in three years.

He said his immediate priority was the provision of urgent relief, including forging temporary housing for displaced Palestinians. His second priority would be rehabilitating "essential and vital infrastructure," he said, followed by reconstruction of homes and buildings. "Gaza will return and be better than it used to be within seven years," he said.

According to a 2024 UN report, rebuilding Gaza's shattered homes will take until at least 2040, but could drag on for many decades.

Rebuilding Gaza

Ali Shaath, born in 1958, is originally from Khan Younis in southern Gaza. He previously served as the deputy minister of planning in the Palestinian Authority in the occupied West Bank, where he currently resides.

In that role and others, he oversaw the development of several industrial zones in the West Bank and Gaza. He holds a PhD in Civil Engineering from Queen's University Belfast.

Shaath's upbeat assessment of the timeline for rebuilding Gaza is almost certain to face challenges as mediators struggle to agree terms on disarming Hamas, which refuses to give up its weapons, and deploying peacekeepers in the enclave.

It was unclear how Shaath's committee would proceed with rebuilding and gaining permissions for the import and use of heavy machinery and equipment — generally banned by Israel.

Israel, which cites security concerns for restricting the entry of such equipment into Gaza, did not respond to requests for comment on Shaath's appointment and plans.

Shaath said the Palestinian committee's area of jurisdiction would begin with Hamas-controlled territory and gradually increase as Israel's military withdraws further, as called for in Trump's plan.

"Ultimately, the (committee's) authority will encompass the entire Gaza Strip 365 square kilometres from the sea to the eastern border," he said in the radio interview.

Support from Hamas, Abbas

The formation of Shaath's committee has won support from Hamas, which is holding talks on Gaza's future with other Palestinian factions in Cairo.

Senior Hamas official Bassem Naim said the "ball is now in the court of the mediators, the American guarantor and the international community to empower the committee".

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas also voiced support for the committee, which he said would run Gaza through a "transitional phase".

"We reaffirm the importance of linking the institutions of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza, and avoiding the establishment of administrative, legal and security systems that entrench duality and division," Abbas said. —Reuters

Printed at Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Khalil Mohsin and published for Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd by Shahjahan at Haroon House, Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road, Karachi. EDITOR: ZAFFAR ABBAS